

Exercise Evaluation Report

Op HIPPO

Location: New Plymouth

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Evaluator(s): *Sunny Peeters, Regional Manager, Coastguard Eastern Region*

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Executive Summary

Operation HIPPO was held at the Taranaki Coastguard HQ on the 9th of February 2019. It was a marine based exercise simulating a downed oil rig crew helicopter in the area of water just out from the port.

The organisers also involved a number of different organisations to test their ability to work together while working on a large task.

The objectives were designed to test various aspects of the operations including IMT, communication, and inter-organisational cooperation.

There is clear evidence that on water skills possessed by the participating organisations are strong and well-practiced in their own right. Some good points have been recognised by the IMT to practice and build on.

There are good opportunities to learn from this exercise and the short list of recommendations will only add to the strengths that were displayed

1. Recommendations

Marine SAR Assets: Very good result. Would benefit from more work/practice together in terms of understanding capacity and limitations of respective agencies. Current cooperation at an acceptable level as a whole.

Communication: More research is required to identify what is needed to ensure ALL the appropriate channels, software and hardware necessary, to run a multi-agency task effectively are in place and ready for use.

Investigation into the capacity that FENZ possess and how it can be used more effectively as a central part of the planning, incident management platform and communication needs to be undertaken. A clear understanding of what is on offer, how it can be improved and when it needs to be used will add benefit to successful outcomes.

IMT and the CIMS structure: The use of adequately trained personnel in roles of leadership and responsibility is needed.

Early establishment of IMT roles with clearly identifying vests and areas of responsibility is essential.

Individuals with a deeper understanding of the role and areas of responsibilities should be preferred to take up leading roles. (Police are still responsible but can use skills possessed by others that exceed their own).

Develop a robust understanding of the documentation process prescribed through CIMS and practice the effective and efficient use of the forms. This will help to drive, guide, and record the actions taken to address events of this nature.

2. Introduction

Each year Police and SAR partners around the country are expected to conduct search and rescue exercises to improve capacity and ensure readiness. This exercise, “Op Hippo”, was conducted from the Coastguard Head Quarters in New Plymouth. It was intended to test the IMT, communication and inter-organisational cooperation of on-water assets. The purpose was to test the ability of local resources and engage the expertise of various agencies to achieve a specific objective. In this case the Police organisers called on Coastguard, local harbour master and port assets, surf lifesaving and FENZ and other maritime assets.

The event ran smoothly and provided adequate opportunity for learning and improvement.

3. Background

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3.1 Background to the Exercise

The exercise was planned to assess the ability of the local recourses to cope with a multi-agency/mass causality Search and Rescue incident.

The intention was to get as many resources working together to meet a need that would exceed the capacity of any one organisation.

3.2 Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

The SAREX was run on the 9th of February 2019 out of the Coastguard HQ in New Plymouth.

3.3 Participating organisations

Police

Coastguard

Port of Taranaki

MPI

Cape Egmont Sea Rescue

Surf Lifesaving

FENZ

3.4 Exercise aim

To develop learning and growth opportunities around multi-agency involvement in the event of maritime search and rescue or emergency.

3.5 Exercise objectives

To assess and build the on water capability between all agencies working together in the maritime environment. To test the IMT structure for all maritime response agencies developing a depth in Coordinated Incident Management Systems roles.

3.6 Exercise Scenario

Scenario –

08 Feb -HNZ Helo – Callsign ZK-HNZ departed the FPSO Umuroa at 15:15 with 14 POB.

Distress call received at 15:40 –

“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday

This is ZK-HNZ, ZK-HNZ, ZK-HNZ

Mayday this is ZK-HNZ

Our position is 39°03.347S, 173°58.900E, course 050°

We have catastrophic engine failure due to fire and preparing to ditch into the ocean.

We require immediate assistance

We have 14 Pob including Pilots

All Pob are wearing survival suits and Life Jackets”

- Transmission lost -

RCCNZ are the lead agency mobilising Todd Energy Rescue, Mikotahi, Rawinia, Cape Egmont Sea Rescue, South Taranaki Rescue, MPI, Surf lifesaving and Helo
All vessels searched the area within a 3nm radius from the splash point to 90% POD before the search was called off due to low light and deteriorating weather.
7 of the 14 persons have been recovered, 4 survived but in critical condition, 3 deceased
7 persons still not accounted for.

Day 2 09 Feb – RCCNZ hand over lead to Police with corrected Datum for 0700 9th Feb –
weather is as recorded on the day of the exercise.
All vessels are available with fresh crew including helicopter.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

To enhance multi-agency and inter-group coordination between the Police, Coastguard, Port Taranaki, MPI and their support agencies and personnel in the New Plymouth area.

To provide an opportunity for Operational personnel to refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

To provide Incident Managers an opportunity to refresh and practice their search and rescue incident management knowledge and skills.

To identify gaps in knowledge, skills and capabilities that need further exploration or development.

To pass recommendations to address those gaps to the respective Training Officers and/or Committees.

To ensure value is delivered for all personnel involved.

4.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation was limited to the “day 2” aspect of the scenario and it was understood that the handover-takeover between the IMT and the asset crewing resources was not part of the evaluation. The intention was to look at the function of the IMT and the cooperation of on water assets as outlined above.

4.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

The IMT and the radio communication aspect were well observed. The on scene coordination of the exercise was not observed as there was only one evaluator.

4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

This report was requested by the Police as a requirement from NZSAR. The Police engaged the evaluator at an early stage in the development of their planning but the Objectives and KPI's had already been well developed and set.

The needs assessment and scenario were made available to the evaluator and there was a good level of cooperation and clear understanding of what the desired outcomes would be.

The evaluator was present from the time the exercise commenced till the time it ended and had access to every area appropriate with a high level of cooperation and consultation around the evaluation.

Once the notes, photographs and documents were all collated the report was completed in draft format and submitted for comments.

At the conclusion of that the report was finalised and submitted.

4.5 Other information

N/A

5. Findings

5.1 Enhance multi-agency and inter-group coordination.

The exercise involved the services of Police, Coastguard, Port of Taranaki, MPI and Cape Egmont Sea Rescue, Surf Lifesaving and FENZ.

From the outset of the initial tasking's the resources appeared to be tasked to the correct type of job for their appropriate capacity. However, some resources were not used to their full capacity. The FENZ mobile command centre appeared to have a far better operational layout and this was not used for that purpose. After some inquiries were made it was revealed that there was limited radio communication capacity within the FENZ asset. This may have been the reason why the entire asset was not used at all until later in the exercise when the unit was moved to a higher point to act as a repeater for a radio channel.

The IMT was a large focus of this exercise. The support IMT members appeared to be trained and ready to fill the various functions of an IMT under the CIMS structure. However, there was evidence to indicate that a clear understanding of how to operate the system was lacking. Police staff were placed in key roles for which they had not been trained. As a result there was confusion around the roles and responsibilities of the SAR trained personnel. This was further exacerbated by the fact that there was no clear indication as to who was performing what role of the IMT. No vests, job titles or clear areas of responsibility were displayed or implemented. This was clearly observed when the "SAR advisor" was taking the lead role in Intel and Planning while the roles were in fact the responsibilities of two other people. It should be noted that the SAR advisor was able to carry both the roles under significant pressure to produce some of the formal taskings prior to the time the reflex tasks were completed. After the CIMS vests arrived and the roles were reset, there was a noticeable change in the stability of the team and the load seemed to be shared more appropriately.

Having set the initial tasking and prior to the team being reset the SAR advisor and his team of volunteers produced clear and concise advice with tasking's to be undertaken. This was not processed as a tasking or a group of tasking's and as a result there was little methodical search coverage of the determined area and poor evidence to indicate that the plan was approved, communicated or monitored until later in the exercise.

From the observations in the communication room, there appeared to be adequate communications between the assets on the water and sufficient tasking instructions passed to the On Scene Coordinator that allowed parts of the search area to be cleared as expected. Communication between the IMT and the assets was hampered by technical issues that the IMT took measures to address. The FENZ asset was tasked to act as a repeater and this worked with limited success. The Radio operator, who was located at the ICP, was able to pass, receive, and log communications acceptably but at times this was not passed back to the IMT in a timely manner.

5.2 To provide an opportunity for Operational personnel to refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

The evaluator had limited access to the SRU once the exercise was underway. Prior to commencement all the on-water assets tied off at a nearby boat ramp and the evaluator was able to observe the crews, vessels, skippers and additional personnel that were engaged in the event. It was clear that there was a very strong set of skills, experience, equipment and readiness at this level of the overall exercise. All skippers were properly briefed and many asked intelligent questions that demonstrated their ability and confirmed that the briefing was comprehensive.

As previously mentioned, there was limited access to the On Scene Coordination once the vessels were underway. The OSC role was given to Police. Messages were passed back and forward well. It was anticipated that there may be a real-time-event that would require the primary OSC vessel to pull out. This was mitigated by a placement of a secondary OSC in an alternative vessel to ensure that the SAREX could run smoothly in that event.

The SAD made early in the establishment of the IMT was not fully implemented until much later in the exercise. As a result the IMT did demonstrate a slight disconnect in the capability of the vessels to perform tasks within some of the timings laid out. During a debrief an OSC mentioned “coming towards the end of a tasking we were waiting for tasking’s, I often wondered who was in control”. This was also evident in the tasking where it came to the time that it would take for the vessels to complete the tasking. “There was some issues experienced that some messages were doubled up and this created a lot of confusion” It should be noted that as soon as the SAC did become a priority it was then managed well.

5.3 To provide Incident Managers an opportunity to refresh and practice their search and rescue incident management knowledge and skills.

The IMT have clearly identified good opportunities to learn out of this exercise.

Utilising Police in key roles may not be the best use of resources where there are trained and experienced people available who could do the task and provide valuable advice to the Police who in turn can put things in motion.

It appeared that the Incident Controller may not have had *current* experience in the role. The assistance of a mentor may produce better learning. Early establishment of the IMT appeared organic in nature and resulted in crossing roles and responsibilities leaving some IMT members overloaded and others underworked. The Intel and Logistics posts appeared to be untrained and inexperienced. The media role was given to someone who was able to attend the task well. Once the IC reshuffled the IMT and roles were clearly indicated by the wearing of vests and clear roles, the operation began to take shape.

Planning meetings were held at regular intervals but these were not used to inform or update the Incident Action Plan. Many of the IMT displayed a lack of understanding that the IAP existed and the IC was not able to identify where the IAP was. As a result the IAP was of little use.

It was evident that the understanding of the CIMS forms and their use was limited. This is demonstrated by the use of Tasking Sheets and other forms like: the marine SRU tasking sheets being incomplete, the scenario weighting form, information collection plan, situation report, found item register, and individual found item sheets etc not being used and therefore not being adequate for use in subsequent enquiries. These may have been completed at the end of the exercise but there is no evidence at this stage to support that.

5.4 To identify gaps in knowledge, skills and capabilities that need further exploration or development

5.4.1 The exercise presented a great opportunity to identify where learning prospects exist.

The on water assets and crew had the opportunity to prove their skills, knowledge and capabilities and did so to the point where there was no significant gaps identified from an on-shore point of view.

5.4.2 The communication presented challenges in terms of some technical issues around radios and geographical obstacles also being felt. Adequate levels of staffing in the communications room and improved physical traffic flow in and out of the room could produce benefits

5.4.3 The IMT is where the biggest learning opportunities exist.

Current skills and relevant training of Police staff to take key roles may need to be reconsidered. Using personnel (non Police) who are skilled, trained and experienced in the

key role could be an advantage. It is understood that the Police are the responsible agency for Search and Rescue, there are times where the tasks and responsibility may need to be shared. Using Police in roles to support the direction of the activities once informed by technically skilled personnel early could produce early benefits. Clearly appointing roles and having personnel identified within the IMT must also be considered.

5.5 To pass recommendations to address those gaps to the respective Training Officers and/or Committees.

This report has identified findings and made recommendations that will help support this KPI.

5.6 To ensure value is delivered for all personnel involved.

It was clear to the evaluator during, and after the exercise that many of the participants improved their understanding of the process, structure, function and purpose of the CIMS platform. It appears that many of the Police staff have also seen the advantage of the system, not only to assist in the management of incidents, but also to help them prepare for enquiries that may follow.

6. Conclusions

Overall the objectives were met. The “on water” capacity is at a very high level and interagency cooperation will only improve with more practice working together and technical improvements being implemented around radio communication.

The IMT can grow and improve by focused attention training Police in key roles.

The outcome of the SAREX is positive in line with the objectives.

7. Appendix

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